DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 305 CE 025 177

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TITLE Male-Female Wage Differentials in the United States.
NOTE 19p.; For a related document, see CE 025 176.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Females; *Males; *Mathematical Formulas; Mathematical Models; *Multiple Regression Analysis; Salaries; *Salary Wage Differentials; *Wages
IDENTIFIERS *United States

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to describe a method of estimating female-male wage ratios. The estimating technique presented is two stage least squares (2SLS), in which equations are estimated for both men and women. After specifying and estimating the wage equations, the male-female wage differential is calculated that would remain if the women in the sample had the same productive, locational, and/or occupational characteristics as the men. The wage differential is then calculated, assuming that the women in the sample have the same structural wage equation as the men. The latter adjustment equates the rate at which men and women transform productivity-enhancing attributes into wages. This adjustment allows the researcher to ascertain what the female wages would be if women were able to convert their productive attributes into wages at the particular rates that men do. Finally, the authors identify explicitly the particular attributes that are most important in closing the wage gap between males and females. (BM)

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ED189305

MALE-FEMALE WAGE DIFFERENTIALS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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JUN 2 1980

CN 002 771

MALE-FEMALE WAGE DIFFERENTIALS IN THE UNITED STATES

I. Introduction

The increasing importance of women as participants in the labor force during the last few decades has led to an increasing amount of research effort to identify, measure, and explain male-female wage differentials (see, for example, Sanborn, 1964; Bayer and Astin, 1968; Fuchs, 1971; Cohen, 1971; Manche, 1971; Suter and Miller, 1971; Sawhill, 1973; Hamilton, 1973; Gwartney and Stroup, 1973; Ferber and Lowry, 1976). Owing to data limitations that led to specification errors and/or errors in variables, the results of most of the analyses of male-female wage differentials may be biased, as the authors themselves point out. Also, analysts who used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression techniques failed to account for the simultaneity between the wage, or earnings, variable and certain of the explanatory variables in regression. In addition, since some of the explanatory variables usually included in regression have different magnitudes or signs for men and women, past analyses that contained a sex dummy variable to deduce wage differences were misspecified.

We hope to shed some light on the existence and magnitude of the male-female wage differential by applying a richer data set than others have used to a simultaneous equation regression model. The estimating technique is two stage Least Squares (2SLS). Equations are estimated for both men and women. After specifying and estimating the wage equations, the male-female wage differential is calculated that would remain if the women in the sample had the same productive, locational, and/or occupational characteristics as the men. The wage differential is then calculated, assuming that the women in the

sample have the same structural wage equation as the men. The latter adjustment equates the rate at which men and women transform productivity-enhancing attributes into wages. This adjustment allows us to ascertain what the female wages would be if women were able to convert their productive attributes into wages at the particular rates that men do. Finally, we identify explicitly the particular attributes that are most important in closing the wage gap between males and females.

II. Model and Data

The first step in estimating male-female wage differentials is to specify accurately the wage equation. Microeconomic theory and the theory of investment in human capital teaches that the wage equation should contain at least the following variables:

$$\text{WAGE} = F(\text{EDUC, PRODEX, SES, HOURS, DISTWK, IQ, ACHMOT, CURRENT REGION, MARITAL STATUS, INDUSTRY, UNION POWER, HELP, TENURE, VETERAN, FATHER'S SES, FARM BACKGROUND, JOB TRAINING}), \quad (1)$$

where EDUC, PRODEX, SES, HOURS, DISTWK, IQ, and ACHMOT are endogenous variables and the remaining variables are exogenous.[1] The explanatory variables are described in Table 1; the wage variable is average hourly earnings.[2] A particularly important and unique variable in this data set is productive experience (PRODEX). While most analysts have defined experience to equal age minus years of schooling minus six, the measure used here is the number of years the respondent actually worked fulltime since the age of eighteen.

In order to insure the identification of the wage equation, the following equations are specified:[3]

EDUC = F(ACHMOT, IQ, FATHER'S SES, FARM BACKGROUND), (2)

DISTWK = F(WAGE, INDUSTRY, CURRENT REGION, MARITAL STATUS), (3)

HOURS = F(EDUC, WAGES, ACHMOT, TENURE, MARITAL STATUS), (4)

SES = F(WAGE, EDUC, ACHMOT, IQ, FATHER'S SES, FARM BACKGROUND, JOB TRAINING), (5)

PRODEX = F(EDUC, ACHMOT), (6)

IQ = F(EDUC, FARM BACKGROUND, FATHER'S SES), (7)

ACHMOT = F(FATHER'S SES, EDUC), (8)

The data set consists of a subsample of the cross-section head of household data collected in a panel survey conducted annually from 1968 to 1975 by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan (1972). Using the observations in a sample of 1525 men and 206 women who are white and were heads of household during at least the period 1972-75, the parameters in the wage equation are estimated using 2SLS.[4]

III. Estimation

Using the observations in the subset of males and females who were heads of household at least during the three years period, the parameters in the wage equation are estimated using 2SLS. Estimates for the male and female wage equations are given in Table 2. Variables that are significant in explaining wage variations in one or both of the equations are discussed below.

DIVORCED is an important explanatory variable in the female wage equation, but not in the male equation. Apparently, a divorced female, to some extent,

is free from the social and economic pressures which the intra-familial division of labor often requires. Furthermore, the stronger, more able, more independent female may have more desire to break an unsatisfactory marital bond. Hence, it appears that the variable DIVORCED is a proxy for certain productive characteristics and preferences which influence the female wage.

Head currently residing in the Northeast (NEHDCUR) is the other variable which is significant in the female equation, but not significant in the male wage equation. This locational variable appears to be a proxy for certain preference and attitudinal attributes of females. The Northeast has historically produced independent, free-thinking females who tend to be relatively more oriented toward achieving success through market work than are women from other parts of the country. It is also highly possible that women who work in the Northeast tend to encounter less rigidity of attitudes toward the "proper" things for females to do.

Three variables are statistically significant in both the male and female wage equations. They are HELP, TENURE, and VETERAN. TENURE represents specific on-the-job experience and seniority. HELP is a measure of market strength and information. VETERAN status may represent independence and a desire to succeed (for females especially), and investment in human capital. In addition, some employers might treat veteran status as a credential. Note, however, that the sample size of female veterans is exceedingly small.

Several explanatory variables are significant in the male but not the female equation. Variables in this category are ACHMOT, PRODEX, FARMBG, MDURABLE, MNONDURA, and UNPOWER.

The fact that ACHMOT is significant for males, but not for females, could result from the differential criteria which society has traditionally

used to identify successful males and females. Males generally attempt to satisfy their needs for achievement by succeeding financially. Females, however, have traditionally had noneconomic avenues through which their needs for achievement could be gratified.

The coefficients on PRODEX are quite different in the two equations. However, since women in the data set have spent an average of about fourteen years out of fulltime work since age eighteen and men spent an average of only three years, this result is expected. If it is thought that individuals increase their earnings by investing in on-the-job training, one would expect that women who spend less time on the job than men during a given period of time acquire less human capital. If this is the case, wages will be related to time on the job. Hence part of the cost of not working for women is the loss of that component of wages that would have been yielded by the foregone human capital investment. The low return to PRODEX for women might also be explained partly by skill obsolescence. If obsolescence occurs at a faster rate when one is not working, it is clear that females will have lost relatively more of their investment in human capital by having been out of the labor force for an average of eleven years longer than males.

Having a farm background (FARMBG) decreases the wage earning ability of males considerably more than for females. Working in durable manufacturing (MDURABLE) and nondurable manufacturing (MNONDURA) are significant for males but not for females. This latter finding is not surprising since females tend to predominate in the low-wage jobs within these industries, while men tend to occupy managerial positions that pay higher wages, relative to such male positions in other industries. Union power (UNPOWER) is significant for males

but not for females. This result may stem from the fact that women belong to relatively weaker unions than do men, or that women belong to unions which put relatively more emphasis on nonwage benefits.

In most analyses of male-female wage differentials that have appeared in the past, variables denoting education, IQ, and SES in wage equations have been found to be statistically significant. Although these findings were not unanimous, the estimating technique in almost every case was OLS.

As was pointed out above, most analysts who have estimated wage equations for males and females have used the OLS technique. When the wage equation contains endogenous variables other than wage, this technique is used inappropriately. To verify that there is a significant difference in the coefficients of the wage equation when OLS is chosen over 2SLS as the estimating technique, Table 2 was reproduced using the results of OLS. In general, the OLS technique yielded the following: (1) larger coefficients, particularly for the endogenous variables; (2) some sign changes; (3) almost twice as many statistically significant variables in the male wage equation and three times as many in the female equation (all of the endogenous variables in both equations were significant except IQ in the female equation).

Male-Female Wage Differential

Estimates for the male and female wage equations are given in Table 2. The regression coefficients and the variable means (or proportions) in Table 1 are used to analyze the male-female wage differential.

The average male wage in the sample is $6.23 per hour, while the average female wage is $3.82 per hour. These wage rates yield a female-male wage ratio of 0.61. It would be incorrect to attribute this entire wage differential to sex discrimination unless the males and females were homogenous in

every way except for sex. Such homogeneity can be approximated through a process whereby the female endowments of productive attributes and occupational and locational distributions are made equal to those of the males in the sample. Accordingly, we shall assign the females the mean value of each of the continuous explanatory variables which appear in the wage equation. Also, we assign females the same proportional distribution as males have with regard to the discrete variables. This will cause males and females to be homogenous in all of the characteristics which appear in the wage equation. To the extent that important characteristics have not been omitted, adjusted female wages should closely approximate male wages in the absence of sex-related wage differentials. Using the data in Table 2, we find that the female wage after adjustment is equal to 82 percent of the male wage. This represents an increase of 21 percentage points over the unadjusted wage ratio.

Another adjustment technique which is similar to the one just used, but which generally requires smaller adjustments in the level of productive endowments and the distributional characteristics, is to assign males and females the grand means or proportions for each of the explanatory variables. Using this latter technique, the adjusted wage for females is $5.39 and the adjusted wage for males is $6.02, yielding a female-male wage ratio of 0.90 (see Table 2).

A third type of adjustment combines the male coefficients with the female means or proportions. This adjustment yields a measure of the female-male wage ratio that would occur if females were able to transform their attributes into dollars at the same rates that males do. This adjustment raises the female-male ratio from an unadjusted value of 0.61 to an adjusted ratio of 0.62 (see Table 2). This evidence shows that, although men may trade some attributes for wages at a better rate than do women, on the whole women fare about the same as men in terms of overall returns to their particular levels of attributes.

When the OLS regressions are used to calculate the female-male wage ratios, we obtained the following adjusted ratios: .73 (females are assigned the mean level of male endowments), .79 (females are assigned the coefficients of the male wage equation), and .91 (males and females are given the "grand means" level of attributes).[5]

Individual Determinants of the Wage Differential

In order to identify explicitly the particular attributes which are most important in terms of closing the wage gap between males and females, as opposed to being important in the sense of explaining a statistically significant amount of the variation in the male or female wage, individual adjustments on each explanatory variable, seriatim, are made. After each adjustment, the female wage and the new female-male wage differential are calculated. The results of two sets of adjustments are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 contains all of the explanatory variables which appear in the wage equation. The variables are listed according to the absolute value of the reduction in the wage differential which occurs when females are given the male level of endowment of the particular attribute in question. The effect of veteran status (VETERAN) is the most important in closing the wage gap. If females were distributed between the categories of VETERAN and NONVETERAN in the same proportions that males are, their average wage would be increased from $3.82 to $4.75. This would decrease the wage differential by about 38 percent. Conversely, if as large a proportion of females as males were married, the wage differential would be increased by almost 16 percent. An examination of the five most important variables (VETERAN, MARRIED, DISTWK, ACHMOT, DIVORCED) as they appear in Table 3 reveals that they have several similarities: (1) none are intergenerational or background variables, (2) none are

industry or occupation variables, and (3) with the possible exception of VETERAN, none represent investment in human capital. In fact, they can all be considered to some extent to be preference variables. Observations on these five variables alone provides information relevant to the question of whether a given female would best be described as an "economic woman." One obviously should not interpret the above statement to mean that the five variables alone are both necessary and sufficient to determine female wage levels. They do appear, however, to be proxies for preferences and attitudes which are necessary, albeit not sufficient, for females (or males) to possess if they expect to earn high wages.

Table 4 uses the adjusted means process which was described earlier to deduce the male-female wage differential. The five most important variables appearing in Table 4 are the same as those given above although the ordering is different. The merits of the adjustment process that yields the result in Table 4 are the same as those given above in the calculation of the adjusted male and female wage differential. The idea that a female must want to emphasize market work and to get feelings of achievement through market work rather than through being the "domestic" in the intrafamilial division of labor appears to be strongly supported by Table 4.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

The primary objective of this paper has been to estimate adjusted female-male wage ratios. While the unadjusted ratio is 61 percent, the adjusted wage ratios range from 61.5 to 90 percent, depending on the adjustment technique employed. The most important characteristics which a female head of household can possess to increase her wage relative to a man's are: veteran status,

either married or divorced, travel a relatively long distance to work, and highly achievement motivated.

Although the magnitude of our ratios is consistent with that found by other analysts, we believe that the ratios are measured in a more dependable fashion than others have done. By applying the richest, most current data available, dealing with women at work to a multi-equation model, estimated by 2SLS, we have avoided some of the problems encountered by others which were pointed out in the introduction.

FOOTNOTES

1. While it is clear from the Survey Research Center (1972) and Veroff, et al. (1971) how most of the variables are defined, to measure father's occupational status, the occupation of father was transformed by the authors into a Duncan Status Score which assigns prestige or status ranking to occupational classifications.
2. It should be emphasized that the model specified here implies that not only is the wage a function of the endogenous variables, but it is jointly determined by them.
3. The identification of the model represented by the eight equations was formerly tested by procedures given in Fleisher and Rhodes (1976).
4. The use of discrete (dummy) variables in the regression model requires that one class be deleted from each category of independent variables. It is clear from Table 1 which class was deleted.
5. Since the models, data, estimating techniques, and time periods covered differ between this study of male-female wage differentials and those of others, as well as among the others, a comparison of adjusted wage ratios is of little value. A review of several past studies, however, reveals the following (unadjusted) adjusted ratios: Sanborn, (.58).88; Fuchs, (.60).66; Cohen, (.55).80; Suter and Miller, (.39).62; Sawhill, (.46).88; Malkiel Malkiel, (.65).81; and Gwartney and Stroup, (.33).40.

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TABLE 1

VARIABLES IN THE WAGE EQUATIONS

VARIABLE NAME[a]	VARIABLE DESCRIPTION
EDUC	Years of education
PRODEX	Years of full-time work since age eighteen
SES	Duncan's index for occupations
HOURS	Annual hours worked
DISTWK	Distance to work (one-way)
IQ	An index for level of general intelligence
ACHMOT	An index for the level of achievement motivation
CURRENT REGION	
WEST	Head currently resides in West
SOUTH	Head currently resides in South
NORTHEAST	Head currently resides in the Northeast
NORTH CENTRAL[b]	Head currently resides in the North Central
MARITAL STATUS	
SINGLE	Never married
MARRIED	Married currently
DIVORCED	Divorced currently
WIDOWED[b]	Widowed
INDUSTRY	
FINANCE	Finance, insurance, and real estate
SERVICES	Repair, business, personal, professional services
GOVT	Government - state, local, national
CONTRAN	Construction and transportation
MANUF-DURABLE	Manufacturing - durable
MANUF-NONDURABLE	Manufacturing - nondurable
TRADE	Retail and wholesale trade
AGRI-MINING[b]	Agriculture and mining
UNION POWER	Whether respondent belongs to a union
HELP	Connectedness to sources of help
TENURE	Years worked on current job
VETERAN	Whether respondent is a veteran or not
FATHER'S SES	Duncan's index for occupations, applied to father
FARM BACKGROUND	Head grew up on a farm
JOB TRAINING	Head has received on-the-job training

[a]The first seven variables, EDUC to ACHMOT, are endogenous variables.

[b]The omitted category.

TABLE 2

ATTRIBUTE ENDOWMENTS, DISTRIBUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, AND WAGE EQUATION COEFFICIENTS

MALES AND FEMALES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MALE COEFFICIENTS	MALE ATTRIBUTES	FEMALE COEFFICIENTS	FEMALE ATTRIBUTES
EDUC	-0.07576	12.5312	-0.02825	12.4466
PRODEX	0.04607**	20.5980	0.00340	15.3835
SES	0.01724	41.5095	-0.00165	41.0583
HOURS	0.00004	2211.9403	0.00001	1754.9563
DISTWK	-0.00090	9.4518	0.09480	5.6893
IQ	0.67997	10.1685	0.26636	10.0777
ACHMOT	0.86505	9.3377	0.25437	8.1748
CURRENT REGION				
WEST	-0.36609	0.1672	0.11933	0.2233
SOUTH	-0.15487	0.2872	0.22084	0.2573
NORTHEAST	0.36024	0.2085	0.99361*	0.2185
MARITAL STATUS				
SINGLE	-0.37105	0.0275	0.43255	0.2864
MARRIED	0.81008	0.9200	-0.42733	0.0194
DIVORCED	0.30078	0.0341	0.66015**	0.3204
INDUSTRY				
FINANCE	0.12800	0.0453	0.01155	0.0534
SERVICES	0.88988	0.1790	0.54193	0.4515
GOVT	0.35919	0.0557	1.10071	0.0388
CONTRAN	1.05226	0.1646	1.07413	0.0388
MANUF-DURABLE	1.25899**	0.1862	0.77078	0.0825
MANUF-NONDURABLE	1.41064*	0.0708	-0.82749	0.0388
TRADE	0.48334	0.1239	-0.11573	0.1553
UNION POWER	0.72764**	0.2787	0.61587	0.1262
HELP	0.15873*	6.1764	0.22524*	5.5194
TENURE	0.02990*	8.4990	0.07589*	7.3204
VETERAN	0.38854**	0.4826	2.00525**	0.0194
FATHER'S SES	0.00209	28.7338	0.00788	31.0291
FARM BACKGROUND	-0.65684**	0.3180	-0.22339	0.2524
JOB TRAINING	0.46459	0.2308	9.96322	0.2573
R^2	0.1326		0.3840	

Unadjusted Female/Male Wage = $3.82/$6.23 = .61

a. Adjusted Female Wage/Male Wage = $5.10/$6.23 = .82
b. Adjusted Female Wage/Male Wage = $3.834/$6.233 = .615
c. Adjusted Female/Wage/Adjusted Male Wage = $5.39/$6.02 = .90

NOTES:

a. Females are given the mean level of male endowments.
b. Females are given the male wage equation coefficients.
c. Females and males are given the "grand means" level of attributes.

Coefficients significant at the .05 (.10) level are identified by * (**).

TABLE 3

FEMALE/MALE WAGE RATIOS ADJUSTED FOR PRODUCTIVE AND DISTRIBUTIONAL ATTRIBUTE ENDOWMENT DIFFERENTIALS[a]

EXPLANATORY ATTRIBUTE	FEMALE WAGE (Dollars)	FEMALE/MALE WAGE (Percentage)	WAGE DIFFERENTIAL (Dollars)	REDUCTION IN WAGE DIFFERENTIAL (Percentage)
UNADJUSTED	3.82	61	2.4100	
VETERAN	4.75	76	1.4812	38.53
MARRIED	3.44	55	2.7949	-15.97
DISTWK	4.18	67	2.0534	14.79
ACHMOT	4.12	66	2.1142	12.27
DIVORCED	3.63	58	2.5991	- 7.84
HELP	3.97	64	2.2621	6.13
SERVICES	3.67	59	2.5577	- 6.12
CONTRAN	3.96	63	2.2749	5.6
SINGLE	3.71	60	2.522	- 4.64
UNION POWER	3.91	63	2.3161	3.89
TENURE	3.91	63	2.3206	3.7
MANUF-DURABLE	3.90	63	2.3301	3.31
MANUF-NONDURABLE	3.79	61	2.4365	- 1.09
IQ	3.84	62	2.3859	1.0
GOVT	3.84	62	2.3914	.77
FATHER'S SES	3.80	61	2.4281	- .75
PRODEX	3.84	62	2.3923	.73
FARM BACKGROUND	3.81	61	2.4247	- .6
NORTHEAST	3.81	61	2.4200	- .41
SOUTH	3.83	61	2.4034	.27
WEST	3.81	61	2.4167	- .27
HOURS	3.82	61	2.4055	.18
TRADE	3.82	61	2.4064	.14
EDUC	3.82	61	2.412	- .1
JOB TRAINING	3.82	61	2.4117	- .07
SES	3.82	61	2.4108	- .03
FINANCE	3.82	61	2.4101	- .004

[a]Females are given the mean level of male endowment for each explanatory attribute.

TABLE 4

FEMALE/MALE WAGE RATIOS AND DIFFERENCES WITH ADJUSTMENTS FOR BOTH MALE AND FEMALE PRODUCTIVE AND DISTRIBUTIONAL ENDOWMENT DIFFERENTIALS [a]

EXPLANATORY ATTRIBUTE	MALE WAGE (Dollars)	FEMALE WAGE (Dollars)	FEMALE/MALE WAGE (Percentage)	REDUCTION IN WAGE DIFFERENTIAL (Percentage)
UNADJUSTED	6.23	3.82	61.00	
VETERAN	6.21	4.64	74.71	34.85
ACHMOT	6.11	4.08	66.77	15.77
DISTWK	6.23	4.13	66.29	12.86
MARRIED	6.14	3.48	56.67	-10.30
DIVORCED	6.24	3.65	58.49	- 7.46
NORTHEAST	6.08	3.81	62.66	5.80
CONTRAN	6.21	3.94	63.[illegible]4	5.80
HELP	6.22	3.95	63.5[illegible]	5.80
SERVICES	6.25	3.69	59.04	- 5.39
MANUF-DURABLE	6.21	3.89	62.64	3.73
UNION POWER	6.22	3.90	62.70	3.73
TENURE	6.23	3.90	62.60	3.32
PRODEX	6.20	3.84	61.85	2.07
IQ	6.22	3.84	61.73	1.24
GOVT	6.23	3.84	61.63	0.83
FATHER'S SES	6.23	3.80	60.99	- 0.83
FARM BACKGROUND	6.24	3.81	61.05	- 0.83
MANUF-NONDURABLE	6.22	3.79	60.93	- 0.83
SOUTH	6.23	3.83	61.47	0.41
SINGLE	6.22	3.72	59.80	- 0.04
EDUC	6.23	3.82	61.26	0.00
SES	6.23	3.82	61.30	0.00
HOURS	6.23	3.82	61.31	0.00
WEST	6.22	3.81	61.25	0.00
JOB TRAINING	6.23	3.82	61.28	0.00
FINANCE	6.23	3.82	61.31	0.00
TRADE	6.23	3.82	61.31	0.00

[a]Both males and females are given the same grand mean levels of productive and distributional attributes.